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ABSTRACT

Recent research efforts undertaken by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges have resulted in the construction of two data sets on community college students which can assist two-year colleges in institutional planning and policy making. The first data set is the result of the administration of the General Academic Assessment (GAA), a student survey and assessment instrument that yields information about the knowledge of student cohorts in general education and the liberal arts. Analysis of the data derived from GAA testing of 8,026 students in 23 colleges in four large urban community college districts revealed that 41% of the students were under 21 years of age, 51% had completed less than 30 units, 57% were attending college to prepare for transfer to a four-year institution; and the students accurately predicted their scientific, humanities, political, and mathematical knowledge. The second data set comes from a survey of students at 24 colleges participating in the Urban Community Colleges Transfer Opportunities Program project. Among the findings of this survey were the following: (1) more than half of the students had family incomes of less than $16,000; (2) 75% aspired to a bachelor's degree or higher; (3) over 50% were in college to prepare for transfer; (4) more than 40% indicated that they were not aware of such college services as academic or career counseling; (5) half of the students indicated that they rarely asked instructors for advice and two-thirds rarely had informal conversations with instructors; (6) students with high transfer-oriented behavior tended to be full-time attendees who were younger, employed, and aspiring to graduate or professional degrees. Recommendations based on the two data sets for improving transfer programs and opportunities are included in the paper. (LAL)

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TWO SPECIAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT DATA SETS

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TWO SPECIAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT DATA SETS

Florence B. Brawer

Dr. Green discussed the CIRP freshman survey data sets that are both comparable and replicable, and may be used by community colleges as well as four-year colleges and universities. Dr. Lukenbill has described various types of data accrued by Miami-Dade College. This morning I will discuss briefly two data sets derived from responses by community college students. Both of these sets provide information that can assist two-year colleges in institutional planning and policy-making. These are the G.A.A. (General Academic Assessment) and the Ford UCCTOP student survey.

Since 1974 the Center for the Study of Community Colleges has been tracking trends in the liberal arts and transfer education by surveying students, faculty, curriculum, and instructional practices. We have conducted national studies of faculty, curriculum and instruction; surveyed regional cohorts of students; visited numerous colleges; sponsored workshops to bring people together to share ideas; and disseminated information through papers, conference speeches, and publications.

The various surveys and intensive studies yielded information on course requirements, student and faculty attitudes and demography, instructional practices, curricular sequences,

and reasons for the rise and fall of the liberal arts and general education. But a complete picture could not yet be drawn. How much were the students learning? What did they know about science, social science, and the humanities? The extent of student knowledge -- the purpose of the enterprise -- was still unclear.

There seemed a need for a way of assessing students' knowledge of the liberal arts -- not course-specific knowledge, not knowledge for the purpose of placing students in courses, diagnosing their weaknesses, or comparing them with their fellows. The need was for a procedure to gain information that could be used in program planning and in apprising staff, clients, and constitutents of the learning manifested by students who had taken liberal arts and general education courses in community colleges.

Accordingly, we developed and field-tested a student survey and general academic assessment that yields information about student knowledge in general education and the liberal arts. This General Academic Assessment (GAA) has representative numbers of items in the humanities, sciences, social sciences, mathematics, and English usage. In addition, it contains such background items about the students as age, the number of college credits earned, educational and occupational aspirations, self-assessment of their skills, and the number of liberal-arts courses taken.

The GAA was designed as a research tool, it assesses learning of cohorts of students, not the learning of individual students enrolled in certain classes.

Source of Items

The questions in the demographic portion of the GAA were gleaned from questions that proved useful in the Center's 1980 and 1981 surveys of more than 12,000 students in Washington State and Los Angeles. Many of the questions on students' self-ratings of their academic abilities were extrapolated from the concepts defined by the groups working on Skills for Living in Dallas, associate degree and general education requirements in Los Angeles, the Arts and Sciences in the Maricopa District, and the Core Curriculum Approach to General Education in Miami.

Items for the content portion were drawn from several sources -- The National Assessment of Educational Progress provided numerous usable items in science, humanities, and social sciences available on loan for purposes of this project. The City Colleges of Chicago provided items in English usage. And Miami-Dade provided items in the humanities. Center staff members culled the items with the help of instructors and counselors from several California community colleges. Final selection was made by panels of staff members from colleges in Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Miami, Phoenix, and St. Louis.

Sampling

The combined districts sample was composed of community college students from four major districts: Los Angeles Community College District, Miami-Dade Community College District, St. Louis Community College, and City Colleges of Chicago. These samples were obtained independently by taking every nth eligible class section (every thirtieth in Los Angeles

and every twentieth in the other three districts) from the participating campus' schedules of classes. The class section was used as the unit of sampling because it is the most feasible way of administering a survey to the target population, community college students.

Administration

The survey was subdivided into five forms with each form taking approximately 50 minutes to complete. Students in each selected class were given one of the five forms on a random basis. Thus, the students could complete the assessment during one class period.

Questionnaires were sent to the twenty-three participating colleges, nine in Los Angeles, four in Miami-Dade, three in St. Louis, and seven in Chicago. Of these, 8,026 were returned, representing 3 percent of the four districts total enrollments.

Data Processing and Analysis

In the second step, the data were analyzed, using a prepackaged computer program known as the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (S.P.S.S.). The cumulative scale scores for Math, Literacy, Science, Humanities, Social Science, and Total Liberal Arts were calculated. The Total Liberal Arts Score was computed by adding the scores on the five field scales.

These cumulative scores, and the accompanying background data for each case, were then output from the five form files and combined into one computer file for the entire sample. This combined file was used to generate all analyses.

Several findings may be of interest. For example,

Age

20 or less	-	41 %
21 - 30	-	41 %
31 - 40	-	11 %
41 - 50	-	4 %
over 50	-	3 %

Total Number of Completed College Units

0 - 14 units	-	29 %
15 - 29 units	-	22 %
30 - 44 units	-	19 %
45 - 59 units	-	14 %
60 or more units	-	17 %

Highest Degree Held

None	-	88 %
A.A.	-	6 %
Bachelor's	-	4 %
Professional certificate, Masters or Doctorate	-	2 %

Reason for Attending College

To prepare for transfer to a four-year college or university	-	57 %
To gain skills necessary to enter a specific occupation	-	27 %
To gain skills necessary to advance in a current occupation	-	9 %
To satisfy a personal interest	-	7 %

Career Aspirations

Advance degree professions	-	23 %

Allied health	-	14 %
Applied Arts	-	9 %
Business operations	-	6 %
Management and sales	-	8 %
Social service	-	9 %
Technologies	-	14 %
Trades and crafts	-	1 %
Not listed	-	10 %
Not sure	-	6 %

But the most simple finding, and the one that can be used easily in other surveys, was the fact that students know what they know. Students accurately predicted their knowledge on the test when asked, "Compared to other students at this college, how would you rate your ability to:

1. Understand the implications of scientific and technological developments
2. Understand art, classical music, drama
3. Understand different political ideologies
4. Edit written material
5. Use algebra to solve problems."

UCCTOP

The second data set comes from a survey administered to students in 24 community colleges, which formed the Ford Foundation funded UCCTOP Phase I (Urban Community College Transfer Opportunities Program). Data sets derived from this project included a survey of over 1,600 students, providing the following findings:

More than half the students in the 24 colleges had family incomes of less than $16,000;

Three-fourths of the students aspired to a bachelor's degree or higher;

Over half the students were in college primarily to prepare for transfer;

More than 40% of the students indicated that they were not aware of such college services as academic or career counseling, honors porgrams, orientation for potential transfer students, or senior colleges applications workshops;

Half the students indicated they had rarely asked instructors for advice, and two-thirds of them indicated they rarely had informal conversation with instructors;

Student intentions to transfer and their behavior as measured by their taking part in transfer planning and information gathering activities were at variance;

The students whose transfer oriented behavior was high tended to be the full-time attendees who were younger, most likely to be employed 21-30 hours per week, and aspiring to graduate or professional degrees.

Transfer Opportunities

Most of the UCCTOP college projects to enhance transfer opportunity had to do with student recruitment, transfer institution articulation, and special activities for selected groups of students;

The community colleges could enhance transfer opportunity for their students if they better coordinated their curriculum

with both secondary school and university offerings;

The colleges need better data regarding who transfers and where;

Task forces related to transfer might be organized with the attention of fitting curriculum, student support services, and transfer information together;

Colleges need a procedure for identifying and staying in contact with potential transfer students;

Sophomore level courses must be offered even when enrollments are low;

Computerized transfer information systems including senior college requirements related to individual student programs should be developed;

Potential transfer students should be better connected with the college through peer support groups and by providing job opportunities on campus.

Some of our recommendations may be employed by community colleges nationwide to help students and to facilitate their transfer to four-year colleges. For example, to increase the prestige attached to transfer education and hence its legitimacy as an important institutional function, we recommend that the college delegate responsibility for the administration of transfer education and special services to a high level office in the administrative hierarchy or else create a special office and title such as Vice President or Dean of Transfer Education and Related Services.

We recommend that colleges form special committees or task forces made up of faculty, staff, and students to study and make recommendations for strengthening the transfer function.

A system of identifying potential transfer students at the point of entry should be available in all colleges. These students should be singled out for special services, especially during their first year, special services that focus on strategies to develop individual skills and knowledge that can lead to increased commitment to initial educational aspirations.

Assigning students to a specific counselor who has been trained to work with potential transfer students is also recommended. Many community colleges have given up the practice of assigning counselors to students; instead, students see any counselor that is available. Counselors should have complete profiles for each of the students assigned to them.

College orientation sessions should be held for the purpose of introducing students to the college and its key offices. Orientation sessions should include walking tours of the campus led by advanced students, special cultural activities, and greetings from college officials. While we recognize that orientation sessions in the traditional collegiate sense are difficult to organize in community colleges, we believe that many students could benefit from extensive orientation sessions. And while orientation sessions of this kind might be less expedient and more costly than the videotaped orientation format adopted by some colleges, the potential long-range benefits may justify the investment.

Revising college catalogs to include a section that specifically informs prospective students is also recommended. This section would include listings of transfer requirements to specified senior colleges, the planning steps needed to prepare for transfer, the types of articulation agreements the college has established with senior colleges, and a statement regarding statewide policies and/or guidelines governing transfer between the public two-year and four-year college sectors.

Opportunities should be made available to potential transfer students for developing skills essential to succeed in senior colleges. Writing and research skills in particular should be singled out for special attention either within the normal context of course assignments or through special laboratories. Other recommendations are specified in this report, available from ERIC.

Summary

These surveys -- the CIRP, the GAA, and the UCCTOP -- represent only a portion of information that can be gathered to help institutions help their students. We need to consistently assess our efforts, and gather more data about students that may be used in a practical sense. I thank you.

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